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‘Mad as a refuge from unbelief’: Blake and the sanity of dissidence

David Fuller

‘There are states in which all visionary men are accounted mad men.’<sup>1</sup> As a result of dissent from norms of his culture in poetry, visual art, and religion Blake was such a visionary: he was accounted ‘mad’. His annotations of the phrenologist J. G.

Spurzheim’s *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, or Insanity* (1817) indicate one response.

Cowper came to me and said, ‘O, that I were insane always. I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane? I will never rest till I am so. O, that in the bosom of God I was hid! You retain health, and yet are as mad as any of us all - over us all - mad as a refuge from unbelief, from Bacon, Newton, and Locke.’ (E, 663)

In this visionary visitation ‘madness’ (so-called) is supreme evidence of sanity: what is here called ‘mad’ is, from a properly human perspective, sanity unacknowledged and disallowed - a way of evading the true madness of believing, for example, that spiritual realities have a determining material basis. That is what, for Blake, the Unholy Trinity of Bacon, Newton and Locke signify. There is an irony in Blake’s invoking Cowper in this way. For Cowper madness was a terrible affliction. It drove him - as Blake’s eccentricity and dissent never did - into a madhouse. He did not relish it, as Blake at times relished his supposed ‘madness’, as the index of a valuable alienation. In Blake’s Spurzheim annotation ‘mad’ is used in two senses: non-metaphorical - the kind of affliction that sent Cowper into an asylum; and metaphorical, a negative term adopted with a positive charge - alienation from inert conventions and habits; an active opposition to materialist philosophies. To escape succumbing to the world view of Blake’s Trinity of Error - Bacon, Newton, Locke - is to be ‘hid in the bosom of God’.

Blake was alienated from the presuppositions of his own culture, but he knew that it was the culture, not him, that was parochial; that his view of the value of the supra-rational, however out of tune with his age, had grand antecedents. Both classical and biblical writers had ways of seeing madness in positive terms. In the *Phaedrus*, in the person of Stesichorus Socrates presents madness, ‘provided it comes as the gift of heaven’, as ‘the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings: ... Madness comes from God, whereas sober sense is merely human’. Socrates specifically gives among his examples the poet, possessed by the Muses.<sup>2</sup> He gives a similar account of inspiration in the *Ion* (sections 535-6). This positive vision of madness in Greek writing is paralleled in Roman writers.<sup>3</sup> Drawing together this classical tradition in his *Discoveries* Ben Jonson cites examples from Plato to Ovid.<sup>4</sup> Christian tradition suggested a comparable view. The symbolic actions of the prophets, taken over by God who speaks through them, gain some of their force from being extravagantly at odds with common sense. Speaking in tongues St Paul specifically calls ‘mad’ from the perspective of the unbeliever (1Corinthians, 14.23). Similarly indicative is his revaluative inversion of wisdom and folly: ‘the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God’ (1Corinthians, 3.19). Madness in Elizabethan drama, and above all in Shakespeare, is associated with dissident insight - the madness of Hamlet, and still more the madness of King Lear: alienation from conventional understanding prompts depths of perception to which habit and custom have previously made the character blind. The Augustan eighteenth century moved away from this. In beginning to recover the classical-biblical-Shakespearean sense of madness as connected with genius, inspiration, freedom from convention - an ability to respond

adequately to what is valuable in what is extraordinary - Blake is in tune with a decisive shift in sensibility.

The first intimations of this shift can be found in his earliest work, the youthful *Poetical Sketches* (1783), with its 'Mad Song' (*SPP*, 48-9).

The wild winds weep,  
And the night is a-cold;  
Come hither, Sleep,  
And my griefs enfold.  
But lo, the morning peeps  
Over the eastern steeps,  
And the rustling birds of dawn  
The earth do scorn.

Lo, to the vault  
Of pavèd heaven  
With sorrow fraught  
My notes are driven;  
They strike the ear of night,  
Make weep the eyes of day;  
They make mad the roaring winds,  
And with tempests play.

Like a fiend in a cloud  
With howling woe,  
After night I do crowd,  
And with night will go;  
I turn my back to the east,  
From whence comforts have increased,  
For light doth seize my brain  
With frantic pain.

Blake owned a copy of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The collection, part of a later eighteenth-century vogue for the primitive, included six mad songs, and Percy noted in a preface to them how much more common mad songs were in English than in other European literatures. Writing in the 1770s the teenage Blake was in part native and in the fashion. But Blake's poem is also unusual. It is sympathetic to the mad speaker, which not all mad poems are. And Blake's reader is not told why the

speaker is mad. Most of Percy's songs are about love-madness. In Blake's poem the speaker is radically or metaphysically mad - one whose kinship with night, tempests, roaring and howling is not, as a forsaken lover's would be, contingent. In the final stanza he seeks with demonic pleasure an environment that will allow madness scope. He is driven to this apparently perverse indulgence by flight from the alternative: paradoxically, comfort is painful. A poem that begins (conventionally) with the sufferings of madness ends (unusually) with the sufferings of trying not to be mad, if mad you are. It is a first intimation of an unusual way of seeing the subject.

This is consistent with the way Blake treats other outcast or dissident figures, as in the later lyric, 'Mary' (*SPP*, 280-82). Mary is exceptional (in beauty, but the issue is exceptionality in any form), but admiring recognition of this turns to envy. Mary responds to antagonism by trying to conceal what marks her out: as a result she is treated as mad, caught in a double-bind of alienation - damned both for being, and for trying not to be unusual. That Mary was seen by Blake as an alter-ego is implied by Blake's use of two lines from the lyric as the opening of a poem about himself that describes the Mary syndrome - failing to deal successfully with being unusual by dealing negatively with what makes him so.

O, why was I born with a different face?  
 Why was I not born like the rest of my race?  
 When I look each one starts; when I speak I offend.  
 Then I'm silent and passive, and lose every friend.

Then my verse I dishonour, my pictures despise,  
 My person degrade, and my temper chastise,  
 And the pen is my terror, the pencil my shame;  
 All my talents I bury, and dead is my fame.

I am either too low or too highly prized;  
 When elate I am envied, when meek I'm despised. (E, 733)

The poem follows Blake's account of an altercation with a soldier that led to his being tried on a charge of sedition: it was written at a time when he had more than his usual reasons for feeling an outsider. He adopts or articulates a persona of the alienated outcast whose wisdom is at odds with received practice, and whose characteristic gestures, signifying identity and purpose, are 'mad' - that is, abnormal or disallowed in terms of accepted behaviour. It recalls Blake's first experiment with illuminated printing, *All Religions Are One* (1788), with its epigraph 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'. Blake is John the Baptist, a character of ostentatious weirdness, who prepares the way of the Messiah. Blake prepares the way for himself.

Later, through the figure of Los, the personification of the imaginative powers, Blake shows how such alienation is basic to artistic creativity. We can see Blake working towards this figure in his presentation of the dissident visionaries, Isaiah and Ezekiel, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, and so be the cause of imposition.

Isaiah answered, 'I saw no God, nor heard any in a finite organical perception; but my senses discovered the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, and remain confirmed, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.'

Then I asked, 'Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?'

He replied, 'All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything.' ...

I also asked Isaiah what made him go naked and barefoot three years. He answered, 'The same that made our friend Diogenes the Grecian.'

I then asked Ezekiel why he ate dung, and lay so long on his right and left side. He answered, 'The desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite. This the North American tribes practise; and is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?'

(*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 12-13; *SPP*, 134-6)

Basic here is Blake's irony and its significance. In what is at first presented unequivocally as visionary experience one of the visitor-visionaries is asked about the nature of visions. He affirms, equally unequivocally, that the sense in which the visionary sees anything is entirely symbolic ('I saw no God, nor heard any ... but my senses discovered the infinite in everything'). This sophisticated teasing of any would-be literalist reader goes hand-in-hand - despite the usual Hebraic monotheist exclusivist claims to which Ezekiel refers - with a non-exclusivist religious stance. Isaiah compares himself with Diogenes (another dissident who engaged in weird symbolic actions); Ezekiel compares himself with 'the North American tribes'. As Blake's tractate has it, all religions are one. The teasing is accompanied by an appropriate comic tone. True as it may be fundamentally, Ezekiel takes striking short cuts when he gives his reason for 'eating' dung (itself an extravagantly elliptical representation of the biblical account), and for lying 390 days on his right side and forty days on his left: 'the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite'. This is writing brilliantly in control of tone, and precisely over areas - the nature of visionary experience, and the claims of religious truth - where any tendency to a breakdown of control is most likely to show itself. This is writing about what eighteenth-century sanity called madness - the claim to see visions - but the writing itself is quite the reverse of lunatic: it is ironic, comic, intelligent, poised.

Battling in a life-and-death struggle with a culture that he saw as deeply antagonistic to spiritual life, poised and ironic is not Blake's characteristic stance. When Isaiah sneers that 'many people are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything' he adumbrates an alternative to the poised, ironic mode.

Infected, mad, [Los] danced on his mountains, high, and dark as heaven.  
Now fixed into one steadfast bulk, his features stonify.

From his mouth curses, and from his eyes sparks of blighting;  
Beside the anvil cold, he danced.

(*The Four Zoas*, 57.1-4; E, 338)

Los is not poised, and Blake's account reflects his subject. Los has here reached a significant stage in his fall from eternal into temporal being. The last potentially redemptive faculty of Blake's archetypal human psyche, Los has just completed the creation in the fallen world of his complementary anti-type, Urizen. The keynote of this seven-day de-creation is that 'bones of solidness froze over all [Urizen's] nerves of joy' (*The Four Zoas*, 54.14; E, 336). In order to cope with the conditions of temporal existence, what was fluxile and responsive becomes fixed and insensible; and Los takes on the rigidity of the being he has 'created': 'terrified at the shapes / Enslaved humanity put on, he became what he beheld. / He became what he was doing. He was himself transformed' (*The Four Zoas*, 56.21-3; E, 338). In Blake eternal beings can at will contract or expand infinite senses, inlets of awareness and knowledge. The ability marks a difference between living and merely existing. Los's senses - potential inlets of this higher state of being - in his fall become 'unexpansive'. Fresh to this state of conformity to the conditions of temporal life, consciousness of what he has lost makes Los rage against his condition. His madness is the rage of oppressed sanity.

In *Milton* the mythical Los, archetype of the creative faculty, is replaced by the historical John Milton, poet. Like Los, in grappling with the fallen world Milton too 'became what he beheld'. In *Milton* he returns to earth to recant his errors, particularly his misrepresentation of Christianity in *Paradise Lost*, where it is associated with classical epic and so (in Blake's view) with an unchristian heroic militarism. By struggling to rehumanise the faculty fixed by Los into an unexpansive fallen form



(Urizen), and by reuniting with his alienated feminine aspects, Milton comes to understand how to transcend the oppressions that drove Los to madness.

To bathe in the waters of life, to wash off the not-human ...  
 To cast aside from poetry all that is not inspiration,  
 That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of madness  
 Cast on the inspired by the tame high finisher of paltry blots  
 Indefinite, or paltry rhymes, or paltry harmonies ...  
 To cast off the idiot questioner, who is always questioning  
 But never capable of answering, who sits with a sly grin  
 Silent plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave,  
 Who publishes doubt and calls it knowledge, whose science is despair,  
 Whose pretence to knowledge is envy, whose whole science is  
 To destroy the wisdom of ages to gratify ravenous envy ...  
 These are the destroyers of Jerusalem, these are the murderers  
 Of Jesus, who deny the faith and mock at eternal life.

(*Milton*, plate 43.1-22; *SPP*, 301-2)

Milton here delivers one of the great summary doctrinal statements in Blake's later poetry on the intellectual, spiritual and creative life. He addresses, as Blake sees them, the problems all individuals face in discovering, developing and preserving their creativity. But from the point of view denounced, the manner of denunciation demonstrates the objections to its substance. While from a point of view convinced of prophetic insight Milton embodies an exhilarating exuberance of conviction, to a would-be dispassionate reasoner (to Blake a sly questioner) Milton displays the lunatic's monocular vision. To a Socratic debater the repetition of key terms and structures of prophetic discourse epitomises the obsessive: Milton is mad. Whatever sympathy a reader feels with the terms of the denunciation, many will surely also harbour some sense that anyone who denounces with such unequivocal conviction might well cast a reasonable sceptic in the role of idiot questioner and denouncee. The rhetoric is the character's, not the author's; but the implications of its mode - its stance of no negotiation with alternative views - is endorsed by the parallel implications of Blake's

formal strategies in *Milton*. Radically at odds (for this period) with any reader's formal expectations of epic, *Milton's* non-narrative embodiment of the claim that all the elements of a poem's conception take place 'in a moment' similarly makes no negotiation with conventional formal expectations: these are simply cast aside. The reader's experience is of being confronted with sense-making demands uncompromisingly on the poet's terms. The most common initial response is incomprehension – the response of the poet Robert Southey when Blake showed him *Jerusalem*, which Southey judged 'a perfectly mad poem': 'Oxford Street is in Jerusalem', he jibed, as evidence of its madness. In fact *Jerusalem*, personification of the visionary city of Revelation, is in Oxford Street – as well she might be in a symbolic poem about the spiritual state of England. Nevertheless, Southey 'held [Blake] for a decided madman'.<sup>5</sup>

The movement shown through Los (in *The Four Zoas* and in *Jerusalem*) towards mental and emotional derangement is a constant subject of Blake's work. His poetry is full of characters who are spiritually sick, or are driven to despair or extreme states of scarcely controllable mental suffering, by infection from the surrounding culture, which corrupts love, art, religion, intellectual and spiritual life. Blake's fundamental myth of four *zoas* ('living creatures', from the Greek of Revelation, 4.6) is used to symbolise this disharmony within the individual psyche. There is always a thin line between extreme stress arising from intellectual and spiritual malaise and a final collapse into the deranged. When the zoas battle against one another one thing imaged is an extreme of mental torment which, as these internecine struggles reach points of crisis, shades into madness. 'There they take up / The articulations of a man's soul, and laughing throw it down / Into the frame; then knock it out upon the plank, and souls are baked / In bricks to

build the pyramids' (*Jerusalem*, 31.9-12; *SPP*, 319). The biblical archetype of oppression shows the pattern of all societies: individuality is suppressed in favour of performing one's role in the structure. The result is that 'all the tendernesses of the soul [are] cast forth as filth and mire' (*Jerusalem*, 31.21; *SPP*, 319). Inhuman values act like funnels down which the mind is dragged. Codes that place barriers between love and sexual expression show a characteristic cycle of corruption. Free play of intellect narrows into obsession with the love that is denied; love denied narrows to sexual desire; frustrated desire creates an inward chaos of feeling that is channelled outwards into love's anti-type, violence. As Blake images it, once the roots of Albion's tree – a corrupt, proliferating growth of the banyan type, the branches of which also put down roots - have entered the soul, one form of spiritual sickness leads inevitably to another.

Los's agon (Plate 1) is that of the creative aspects of the personality. It is expected to be the reader's. It draws on Blake's own struggles to create and to find an audience. Blake is also present in his work in his own person, recording his personal witness in the manner of an Old Testament prophet, and, like a self-conscious modern, recording his struggle to give his perceptions form. There is a constant sense in his later work of how difficult and painful the search for understanding and expression can be. In this context even the occasional dogmatisms convey not Olympian, above-the-struggle certainty but rather assertive desperation. But though Los is 'the labourer of ages in the valleys of despair' (*Jerusalem*, 83.53; *E*, 242), despair can be kept at bay. There are also struggles to re-humanise. Sources of affection and inspiration can be protected: they can be preserved in and recovered through art. Music, poetry and painting are 'powers of conversing with paradise' ('A Vision of the Last Judgement'; *E*, 559) – being kept aware

of a world other than the mundane. Art not only images the struggle to retain sanity: it also ministers to the sick.

Blake's most notable graphic work on madness is his colour print 'Nebuchadnezzar' (Plate 2).<sup>6</sup> It carries a meaning quite different from that imaged by the trials of Los. One of a series of twelve works conceived (and perhaps executed) in 1795, at the end of Blake's first period of engraving illuminated poetry, its subject is biblical, from the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of Babylon, dreams of a great and flourishing tree which is cut down by order from heaven, but with a stump and roots remaining. The king's soothsayers are not able to interpret the dream. It is interpreted by the Hebrew prophet, Daniel: the tree is a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar, its cutting down a punishment for sin. Daniel advises righteousness, particularly showing mercy to the poor. Nebuchadnezzar responds by trusting in his power.

While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. (4.31-3; Authorized Version).

Thereafter Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God's power and recovers his reason. The text concludes: 'those that walk in pride [God] is able to abase'.

Blake probably thought of his twelve colour prints as a set. Though they are various in subject (based on the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, and Blake's own myth), the common medium and size, the 1795 date inscribed on several, some apparent pairings, and the fact that a full set was bought by Blake's patron, Thomas Butts, suggest that they

belong together. Among the visually thematic pairs ‘Nebuchadnezzar’ belongs with ‘Newton’. ‘Newton’ is based on an illustration of Blake’s early tractate, *There is No Natural Religion*, where it has the text, ‘He who sees the infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the ratio only, sees himself only’ (E, 3). Staring down at his mathematical diagrams, Newton fails to perceive the divine. ‘Nebuchadnezzar’ is based on a design in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which has the caption, ‘One law for the lion and ox is oppression’ (plate 24; *SPP*, 145). This associates Nebuchadnezzar with the tyrannous Urizen’s orders that all conform to a single standard, culminating in his command of ‘one King, one God, one Law’ (*The Book of Urizen*, 4.40; *SPP*, 215). The *Marriage* design’s crown (absent from the colour print), along with the revolutionary and contemporary text that immediately follows, ‘A Song of Liberty’, may, in the 1790s, suggest a reference to contemporary politics – not only to the bestial nature of any tyrant, but specifically to the madness of George III. Blake was not always sympathetic to the mentally deranged. Nebuchadnezzar and Newton are the reverse of characters such as Los, driven mad by his attempt ‘to [keep] the divine vision in time of trouble’ (*Jerusalem*, 95.20; E, 255). Like Cowper in the visitation recorded in Blake’s *Spurzheim*, Los is driven to madness by resisting materialism. Nebuchadnezzar is mad as a result of his failure to resist.

Los the artist, wrestling with the corruptions of Blake’s society, is also Los the guardian. Searching through London with his globe of fire, he sees the poor and the oppressed, including the inmates of Bedlam.

[Los] came down from Highgate through Hackney and Holloway towards  
London,  
Till he came to old Stratford, and thence to Stepney and the Isle  
Of Leutha’s Dogs, thence through the narrows of the river’s side,  
And saw every minute particular, the jewels of Albion, running down  
The kennels of the streets and lanes as if they were abhorred. ...

And all the tendernesses of the soul cast forth as filth and mire  
 Among the winding places of deep contemplation intricate  
 To where the Tower of London frowned dreadful over Jerusalem, ...  
 ... thence to Bethlehem, where was builded  
 Dens of despair in the house of bread. Enquiring in vain  
 Of stones and rocks he took his way, for human form was none.  
 (*Jerusalem*, plate 31[45].14-27; *SPP*, 319-20)

Though Blake did not finish *Jerusalem* until about 1820 and Bedlam moved in 1815, he is apparently thinking of Los here going to the old hospital.<sup>7</sup> All the other locations in Los's journey are north of the Thames: he comes from the villages north of London to the river's north bank, reaching Bedlam immediately after leaving the Tower – that is, the old Bedlam, in Moorfields. The most notable public concern about mistreatment in the hospital, registered in the report of a Parliamentary Select Committee of 1815, comes too late to have informed the passage. But the conditions in which people were kept were well-known before the formal investigation of 1814-15: that was why the investigation came about. The report shows that inmates were kept several to a room, naked except for a blanket gown, chained up or in yet more drastically restraining forms of fetters, with no distinction between the completely raving and those who in any modern sense would not be seen as 'mad' at all. Staff were little checked, so that violence and sexual abuse were endemic. Blake points up the etymology of the hospital's name, Bethlehem ('house of bread'), to enforce the irony of how the supposed place of care has become a 'den of despair'. The Tower and Bedlam have the same significance: to Los's prophetic sight both are indices of his culture's corruptions. If a civilization can be judged by its prisons, so too can it be judged by its madhouses – which in this period were more-or-less forms of prison. Los chooses Bedlam, along with the Tower, as a place indicative of the nature of his society. As so often with Blake, the historically specific has a larger meaning. The

wider implications of Blake's treatment are Foucaultesque: madhouses are created by intellectual conventions and social conditions that should not be taken at their self-evaluation.

Bedlam was the most famous madhouse of his day. The asylum inmate of most concern to Blake was William Cowper. Blake was closely involved in the writing of the first biography of the poet. Its author, William Hayley, worked on the biography over exactly the period during which Blake lived alongside him under his patronage, from 1800 to 1803. Blake's role was to engrave the biography's illustrations, and it was in part to do this that he moved to live near Hayley, on the Sussex coast at Felpham. Hayley's biography of Cowper was therefore a principal ground of his patronage of Blake, and Hayley told Cowper's cousin, his principal associate in the project, Lady Harriet Hesketh, that Blake worked 'daily by my side on the intended decorations'.<sup>8</sup>

Hayley is explicit in the biography about drawing a veil over Cowper's mental afflictions.<sup>9</sup> He censored Cowper's letters to suit the views of Lady Hesketh, who wished to protect her cousin's posthumous reputation by minimising reference to his depressions and breakdowns. The biography gives no account of Cowper's confinements in a private asylum and attempts at suicide, and no explanation of the religious aspect of his depressions - his Calvinist conviction that he was among the reprobate, doomed to damnation. Working so closely with Hayley, Blake undoubtedly knew more about all this than the biography reveals. He may even have been drawn into the process of censorship. Lady Hesketh strongly disliked the portrait of Cowper by Romney that was to be engraved for the frontispiece: it conveyed too strongly the poet's 'distracted ... look'. She was very much pleased when she found Blake's engraving had 'softened' the

original and had ‘an effect totally differently from that’ of the portrait.<sup>10</sup> Her cousin no longer looked mad.

Blake rejected Cowper’s theology, but he felt an affinity with him both as a poet and for the intensity of his religious experience. He also sensed (correctly) that Hayley saw the two poets in similar terms. In defending Blake from criticisms of the Cowper plates, Hayley commented on his ‘dangerously acute’ sensibility and ‘excesses of feeling’, and described Blake as like Cowper, ‘of whom he often reminds me by little touches of nervous infirmity when his mind is darkened with any unpleasant apprehension’.<sup>11</sup> It was a comparison he often repeated, seeing particularly a kinship between the two poets in mental affliction.<sup>12</sup> Blake too felt a kinship with Cowper, but of a quite different kind. It was a kinship in what he supposed had been the manner of Hayley’s friendship to the dead poet, paralleled by what, by 1803, he saw as Hayley’s patronizing manner to him, particularly Hayley’s doubts about what Blake understood as ‘inspiration’.

Blake’s Notebook quatrains about Cowper also indicate that he saw some analogy (though as far as Hayley’s treatment of Cowper goes this seems unjustified) between how Hayley failed in his supposed friendship to each of them, perhaps unconsciously: in Blake’s view Hayley’s conventional nature made him radically incapable of conceiving of life in the terms in which Blake saw it - and, Blake supposes, Cowper saw it too.

William Cowper Esq<sup>re</sup>

For this is being a friend just in the nick,  
Not when he’s well, but waiting till he’s sick.  
He calls you to his help; be you not moved,  
Until by being sick his wants are proved.

You see him spend his soul in prophecy:



Do you believe it a confounded lie,  
Till some bookseller and the public fame  
Proves there is truth in his extravagant claim;

For 'tis atrocious in a friend you love  
To tell you anything that he can't prove,  
And 'tis most wicked in a Christian nation  
For any man to pretend to inspiration. (E, 507)

To a certain kind of prosaic nature, the poem implies, the whole claim to a special mode of consciousness ('inspiration') is a falsehood, or is at least misunderstood by more ordinary natures, and perhaps a source of antagonism from them. As in 'Mary', the exceptional ('mad' in the metaphorical sense) generates antagonisms that lead to alienation and a madness which, like Cowper's, is entirely non-metaphorical.

Blake attempted to embody what he saw as the fundamental issues of his conflict with Hayley in *Milton*. In the open section of the work – a song sung by an inspired Bard - Blake uses the Calvinist scheme of election and reprobation, but inverts the categories. Satan, of the elect, is self-righteous: he is an accuser of sin and opponent of imagination, at the farthest remove from the truly human and therefore (on Blake's view) the divine. His opponent, Palamabron, is of the reprobate: his qualities are unselfish love and imaginative freedom, both of which suffer under the self-righteous elect. Palamabron is driven to madness by Satan's incomprehension and unconscious tyranny, 'Seeming a brother, being a tyrant, even thinking himself a brother / While he is murdering the just' (*Milton*, 7.16-48 [22-3]; E, 100-101). In this conflict qualities endorsed as virtues by the surrounding culture are subjected to a scrutiny that gradually forces their true nature to reveal itself. They appear as covert egotism, an unconscious hypocrisy whose real desire is to impose on those whose creative openness to the real nature of existence, by giving them more to struggle with, makes them vulnerable to victimization. The justice or

otherwise of this to the historical William Hayley in his dealings with Cowper and Blake is beyond recovery. As a myth it is powerfully applicable to corruptions in the care of those deemed mentally ill whose difficulties and alienation are the result of a human fulness that cannot accept conventional ways of seeing and valuing.

Hayley represented generally accepted standards of taste for the time in poetry and painting, in both of which he was actively interested, as a successful poet and man of letters, and as an acknowledged connoisseur in fine art. He associated Cowper's genuine mental illness with Blake's uncompromising realisation of his own creativity, while such evidence as there is suggests that Blake probably saw Cowper's depressions as manifestations of creativity blocked or misunderstood. He was 'mad as a refuge from unbelief'. Blake may have had particular reasons for having Cowper in mind again when he read Spurzheim in about 1817. Cowper's own memoir, *Adelphi*, which treats his depressions, confinements and attempted suicide much more frankly than Hayley's *Life* had done, was published in 1816, and gave rise to a debate in the periodical press about the relation of Cowper's religious views to his insanity - whether his religion should be blamed for his depressions, or his depressions understood as only alleviated by his faith. Either way, poetry, madness, and religion were understood as the interrelated elements of his condition. Hayley understood Blake as like Cowper, and both as mad. Blake understood himself as like Cowper, and both as creative beyond what ordinary sanity could understand.

Hayley was far from the only one of Blake's contemporaries to think of him as mad. It is a recurrent theme in contemporary comments on Blake and his work, both public and private. Most recent commentary has tended to imply that consideration of

this is superseded, that it is an unreal issue which arose only because of conditions in Blake's culture, not because of things about Blake himself or his work.<sup>13</sup> But though the imputation of madness enraged Blake, he also appears at times to have encouraged it. In any case, the reception history of a writer, as of an individual work, is permanently part of his or her potential meaning. As Blake's devils put it: 'Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 8; *SPP*, 132). The point is to interpret: truth may be believed in images that are highly oblique.

We can see Blake apparently encouraging an imputation of literal belief in spiritual presences, of a kind that he must have recognized might be seen as verging on the insane, in his drawings of visionary portrait heads for the painter John Varley. It has been argued that these visionary heads reflect Blake's interest in contemporary medical psychology, in that they were influenced by his knowledge of phrenology - the pseudo-science of mental faculties supposed to be located in various parts of the skull and investigable by observing bumps on the head.<sup>14</sup> They may also indicate a puckish sense of humour. The accounts of the drawing sessions apparently show Blake taking – or affecting to take - the presence of his supposed sitters quite literally. Herod, Mohammed, the man who built the pyramids, the task-master Moses slew in Egypt, the ghost of a flea: these and many others came to Blake's rooms to sit for their portraits. Questions about whether Blake understood such visionary visits as literal or figurative feature regularly in discussions of his supposed 'madness' in early biographies.<sup>15</sup> It is not now possible to reconstruct what actually happened in the Varley drawing sessions, but it seems more than possible that Blake was having some innocent fun at the expense of the too easy credulity of friends. One must either explain the drawings in some such terms, or suppose

that Blake had wholly abandoned the view of visionary experience offered in the more calculated effects of writing in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* where he teasingly calls to witness the authority of Isaiah and Ezekiel. Either way, while Blake seems to have been at least ready to play to the hilt and beyond the role of the Romantic Artist who drinks the milk of Paradise with a facility denied to ordinary mortals, none of the anecdotes about him seeing and conversing with spiritual visitants is incompatible with the position of Isaiah: 'I saw no [spirit], nor heard any, in a finite organical perception'.<sup>16</sup>

Doggerel verses scribbled in Blake's Notebook around 1810 show him reflecting on 'madness' (so-called) in a much more down-to-earth vein, having some knock-about fun with the issue to recuperate aesthetic criteria more suited to the appreciation of his own work. The lines treat a central element of his aesthetic - the importance of drawing to painting: he admired the clear outlines of Raphael and Michelangelo; he deplored what he thought of as the loss of form in indiscriminate colouring of Rubens and Rembrandt - 'shadows ... of a filthy brown, somewhat of the colour of excrement' (marginalia to Reynolds; E, 655). The poem veers about. The first couplet gives Blake's own view ('Painting ... exults in immortal thoughts', *A Descriptive Catalogue*, IV; E, 541), though filtered through the conceptions of his opponents (in calling his party mad; in his colloquial grammar: he is wild and untutored). He then adopts in caricature the view of his opponents (that drawing is an activity of hand; for Blake it is an activity of mind). His own view returns, with proper nouns as verbs for colloquial scorn (Fuseli is Blake's friend, the Swiss painter). Finally comes more advanced colloquialism (*OED*'s first recorded use of 'jaw' for 'lecture censoriously' is 1810), with 'mad' adopted again from his opponents ('madmen' in their view; in reality the true artists).

All pictures that's painted with sense and with thought  
 Are painted by madmen as sure as a groat,  
 For the greater the fool, in the pencil more blessed,  
 And when they are drunk they always paint best.  
 They never can Raphael it, Fuseli it, nor Blake it;  
 If they can't see an outline, pray how can they make it?  
 When men will draw outlines begin you to jaw them.  
 Madmen see outlines, and therefore they draw them. (E, 510)

This combative good humour shows Blake accepting 'mad' as the fool's reproach that is a kingly title.

Conversely, we see him enraged by the imputation of madness where it might be destructive of serious attention to his art. This happened most seriously in the reviews of his one solo exhibition in 1809. The reviewer was transformed into the epitome of the corruption of English culture in *Jerusalem*. Blake's annotations of Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* make it clear that he understood perfectly well that the fundamental battle is about the point of view from which judgements are made. As *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has it, 'the enjoyments of genius ... to angels look like ... insanity' (plate 6; *SPP*, 129). What some viewpoints see as mad, Blake sees as evidence of heightened perception, often more important insofar as it offends artistic or religious canons of what is orthodox. Blake is a writer like Flaubert, Wilde, Lawrence, Joyce, for whom offence to convention is a sign of spiritual, moral or aesthetic discovery. The value of the discovery may be in inverse proportion to the resistance it excites in conventional minds.

To Blake Reynolds was worse than conventional: 'this man was hired to depress Art' (E, 635). Blake's annotations of Reynolds' *Discourses* are, accordingly, combative in the highest degree.

Reynolds's opinion was that genius may be taught, and that all pretence to inspiration is a lie and a deceit to say the least of it. [If the inspiration is great why call it madness? *deleted*] For if it is a deceit the whole Bible is madness.

It is evident that Reynolds wished none but fools to be in the Arts, and in order to this [*sic*], he calls all others vague enthusiasts or madmen.

He who can be bound down is no genius. Genius cannot be bound. It may be rendered indignant and outrageous.

‘Oppression makes the wise man mad.’ Solomon [Ecclesiastes, 7.7].

(E, 642, 647, 658)

These expressively a-syntactic comments on ‘Sir Joshua and his gang of cunning hired knaves’ (E, 636) reveal Blake’s angry recognition that the way in which Reynolds discounted supra-rational knowledge was to present it as irrational. But for Blake the biblical claim, particularly in the Prophets, that people can be vehicles of knowledge or wisdom when they are taken over by forces beyond themselves is a compelling form of witness that Reynolds’s Neoclassical ideas about aesthetic knowledge as based on learned criteria are false. When Blake asked of the two most famous evangelists of eighteenth-century England, George Whitefield and John Wesley, ‘were they prophets, / Or were they ... madmen?’ (*Milton*, 22.61-2; E, 118), he was recognising that similar views underlie attacks on dissent in religion and in art. Both Reynolds’ doubts about ‘enthusiasm’ and Blake’s repudiatory marginalium arose from a common association between Protestant dissent and a Romantic critique of Neoclassical aesthetics - on the grounds that both Romanticism and Dissent appealed to potentially unregulated ideas of inspiration and an inner light. No ready-made criteria could therefore distinguish the Holy Spirit from the Devil in disguise, the poet from the poetaster, or illumination from lunacy. Accordingly, a usual way of dismissing Protestant dissent was to impugn it as madness. ‘Enthusiasm’ was a more ambivalent term for a range of negative perspectives. Like ‘mad’, it was therefore adopted by Blake as a positive. Los acts ‘that enthusiasm and life may not cease’ (*Jerusalem*, 9.31; E, 152); Blake opposes Reynolds with ‘enthusiastic admiration ... the first principle of knowledge and its last’ (E, 647);

explaining himself to Hayley with a collection of recuperations, he is enthusiastic, mad and drunk: 'Excuse my enthusiasm, or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver in my hand' (E, 757). 'Mad' is simply a crude weapon for the negative range of 'enthusiastic'.<sup>17</sup>

The more extreme term was frequently used of Blake by contemporary critics. As early as 1785 a reviewer of the Royal Academy's annual exhibition referred to his painting of Gray's Bard as 'mad'. In 1808 *The Anti-Jacobin*'s review of his illustrations to Blair's *The Grave* took a similar line. After a negative discussion of the designs the reviewer turned to the dedicatory poem: 'Should he again essay to climb the Parnassian heights, his friends would do well to restrain his wanderings by the strait waistcoat.'<sup>18</sup> That Blake expected an attack somewhat in these terms on his exhibition of 1809 is clear from both his advertisement and his catalogue.<sup>19</sup> Expected though the terms of the attack apparently were, the review by Robert Hunt in *The Examiner* may have struck him as peculiarly savage.

If ... the sane part of the people of England required fresh proof of the alarming increase of the effects of insanity, they will be too well convinced from its having lately spread into the hitherto sober region of Art. ... When the ebullitions of a distempered brain are mistaken for the sallies of genius by those whose works have exhibited the soundest thinking in art, the malady has indeed attained a pernicious height. ... Such is the case with the productions and admirers of William Blake, an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement. ... The praises ... bestowed last year on this unfortunate man's illustrations of Blair's *Grave* have, in feeding his vanity, stimulated him to publish his madness more largely.<sup>20</sup>

Blake's response, worked out in the privacy of his Notebook, was a mixture of cool irony and hearty repudiation.

The painter hopes that his friends, Anytus, Melitus, and Lycon [the accusers of Socrates: to Blake, eternal types of *The Examiner*'s editors, John, Leigh and Robert Hunt] will perceive that they are not now in ancient Greece, and though

they can use the poison of calumny, the English public will be convinced that such a picture as this [Blake's 'Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims'] could never be painted by a madman ... as these bad men both print and publish by all the means in their power. ('Public Address'; E, 578)

The responses to Blake's work found in public comment are paralleled by those recorded in private remarks. Verses in the Notebook addressed to Blake's friend, the sculptor John Flaxman, indicate that Flaxman too had described Blake as mad (E, 507, 508). They show an anger similar to that of the Reynolds marginalia and the Public Address, but now in response not to a recognised opponent but to a friend and artistic associate. In a discussion of Blake as 'this insane man of genius', Wordsworth (who admired some of the *Songs* and copied them into his Commonplace book) is recorded by the diarist Henry Crabb Robinson as saying: 'There is no doubt this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott'.<sup>21</sup> Though it is clearly not what he meant in referring to Blake as 'mad', Wordsworth was not unsympathetic to Blake's fundamental argument about the kind of contest that is going on when the view that it is 'mad' is used to dismiss visionary writing. Wordsworth himself could view 'madness' as valuable dissidence, as in a notably Blakean passage of *The Prelude* on his own early experiences.

Some called it madness: such, indeed, it was,  
 If child-like fruitfulness in passing joy,  
 If steady moods of thoughtfulness, matured  
 To inspiration, sort with such a name;  
 If prophesy be madness; if things viewed  
 By poets in old time, and higher up  
 By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,  
 May in these tutored days no more be seen  
 With undisordered sight: but leaving this  
 It was no madness. (1805 text; 3.147-57)



The extended irony, culminating in ‘tutored’, is unusual, and indicates Wordsworth’s hearty disdain for the judgement of the mediocre on the exceptional. The nexus of qualities is as in Blake: heightened consciousness (the uninhibited feelings of a child; the thoughtfulness of an adult), inspiration in art, prophecy in religion. Nevertheless, for Wordsworth Blake was mad in the plain sense.

This way of talking about Blake found its way straight into biography and criticism for almost a century after Blake’s death. Allen Cunningham (1830), author of the most important biography before Gilchrist’s; Edward FitzGerald (1833), translator of Omar Khayyám; James John Garth Wilkinson, the first to produce an edition of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in ordinary typography (1839); William Michael Rossetti, a principal figure in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who edited the first substantial selection of Blake’s poetry (1874); the conservative poet, Coventry Patmore, author of ‘The Angel in the House’ (on the role of women), for whom Blake’s poetry was ‘delirious rubbish’, its author ‘morally as well as intellectually mad’, an epitome of nineteenth-century tendencies that needed keeping down (1889): all these and more - almost anyone who considered Blake’s work, admirers and detractors - considered his sanity. When the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* ran a series on ‘mad’ artists, Blake duly made an appearance (1880). Even after the turn of the century the issue continued to be routinely discussed, albeit sometimes to be contradicted.<sup>22</sup> Even after Gilchrist’s biography, in 1875, the painter and youthful friend of Blake’s old age, Samuel Palmer, felt he needed to contradict an old and groundless report (1833) that Blake spent thirty years in a madhouse. His conclusion is striking: ‘I

remember William Blake, in the quiet consistency of his daily life, as one of the sanest, if not the most thoroughly sane man I have ever known.’<sup>23</sup>

\*       \*       \*

Damit es Kunst giebt, damit es irgend ein ästhetisches Thun und Schauen giebt, dazu ist eine physiologische Vorbedingung unumgänglich: der Rausch.

For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication.

(Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Expeditions of an Untimely Man’, 8)

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.

We shall return at twilight from the lecture

Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flicked by feeling.

(Wallace Stevens, *Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction*, III.x)

Unreasoning antagonism is not enough to account for the constant invocation of madness in relation to Blake - from many different shades of opinion, in public and in private; not always from opponents, not always from people disabled by lack of perception or vested interest. The constant invocation of madness points to real qualities in Blake’s work. Now that Blake is a canonical figure in English poetry and visual art there is a value in refreshing the perception of these. How to describe these qualities is, of course, problematic: they might be described neutrally as a deep resistance to normalisation. Blake’s complete association of form and content, for example, means that where there is novelty it is characteristic that it should be uncompromisingly, disorientatingly, in technique as well as subject-matter. But beyond this there is in Blake an unusual combination of qualities which mean that, even where he is most sympathetically understood, understanding is partial and in some interesting way skewed - achieved by a positive exclusion of what a different good light can make appear central. It is also a problem inherent in the study of Blake that reading techniques designed to

enlighten, even when they are explicitly about the work's strangeness, have a normalizing tendency that encounters resistance - because the weirdness of Blake's work is permanently part of what it means.

'It is impossible to say a great or noble thing', wrote Ben Jonson, 'unless the spirit is moved'. What is true for the writer is true also for the reader: it is impossible to *hear* a great or noble thing unless the spirit is moved. The reader as well as the poet needs be in some sense 'mad'.

William Hazlitt remarked that age is spent finding out what one thought inarticulately in youth. It is grim to reflect that, for the reader who does not keep open channels to the madness of the Muses, increased ability of articulation may be accompanied by decreased intensity of perception: one might become more able to speak and have less to say. Rousseau may not be entirely right that 'it is impossible to think nobly if one thinks for a living' (*Confessions*, Book 8). He may not, either, be entirely wrong. There is probably some comparable truth about the practice of psychiatry: it is difficult to retain the human flexibility required to hear the deranged humanely if one listens for a living. That thinking is always conditioned by one's situation applies in particular ways if one's situation is that of a teacher. And beyond that, there is always some mismatch between the *understanding* of literature and the *study* of literature in institutions. This has to do in part with the acquisition of what passes for knowledge: in an educational context there is always a danger that information may stand in the place of understanding. Assessors have no speculative instruments with which to see if reading has (as Wordsworth puts it) rectified the feelings: they must settle for seeing whether or not some more testable form of comprehension has taken place. The mismatch between

understanding that is worthwhile in human terms and understanding that is institutionally approved may have even more to do with the spirit in which knowledge is acquired – a conformity to fashionable suppositions, even (and sometimes most of all) within a nominal context of dissent and critique. This includes those forms of thought that a paradigm of knowledge derived from the sciences - knowledge as making progress - imposes on the arts. Institutions especially value this science-progress paradigm, though for reasons to do not with understanding but with funding. The templates of knowledge derived from the most economically powerful disciplines have built into them the assumption that one can study and teach literature as one can study and teach subjects in which objective information has a different role and status. Because the study and teaching of poetry, plays and novels is intertwined with issues of experience and value, the modes of knowledge, the structures within which thinking takes place, and the media of communication used are of the first importance. Those proposed or assumed by the contemporary university often do not fit well the understanding of literature. The contemporary equivalent of what Blake's visionary Cowper called 'unbelief', and Blake traced to Bacon, Newton and Locke, are the excesses of daylight, method, and order – in a word, 'sanity' – encouraged by bureaucratization, mass-production and other characteristic pressures of contemporary literary education. These pressures squeeze out scope for relishing the weirdness of art and acknowledging the mysteries of understanding it.

Universities can further real knowledge of art, but one has often to work against the grain of institutions, which is increasingly towards knowledge regarded as uniform across disciplines. As a result, worthwhile study and teaching tends to take place in

interstices rather than in formal situations. Current developments of education recognise the interstices, and the kind of knowledge implied by the interstitial, less and less. But the fit reader needs his or her responsive measure of the madness of the wild author. It is impossible adequately to *hear* a great or noble thing unless the spirit is moved. The art of William Blake is a paradigm for poetry, which is characteristically addressed to unusual states of consciousness. It is a paradigm not primarily in its content, nor in its mode, but in the flexibility required to hear the sanity beneath its surface weirdness.

### Captions

Plate 1. *Jerusalem*, plate 6. Los, whose creative work leads Blake to depict him as a blacksmith, is shown at his forge, with fire, bellows, hammer, anvil and tongs. He looks up at his bat-winged Spectre – the personification of his paranoia, who attempts to undermine his work by encouraging hatred, doubt and fear. Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

Plate 2. ‘Nebuchadnezzar’. Tate Gallery, London.

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<sup>1</sup> *Laocoön*, in *William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. David Fuller, London, 2000, 361. All quotations from Blake are from this edition (‘SPP’), except for material it does not include. This is quoted from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. D. V. Erdman, with a commentary by Harold Bloom, New York, 1965, rev. edn., 1988 (‘E’), but modernised on the principles described in *SPP* (18-26).

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Walter Hamilton, Harmondsworth, 1975, 46-8.

<sup>3</sup> For example, and mostly famously, in Seneca: ‘nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit’ (there has been no great genius without a touch of insanity), *De tranquillitate animi*, xvii.10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols., Oxford, 1925-52, VIII, 637.

<sup>5</sup> G. E. Bentley Jr, *Blake Records*, Oxford, 1969, 229 (spelling and punctuation modernised).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew M. Cooper, who provides copious information on contemporary cases and treatments of madness, suggests that some of the designs of Blake’s illuminated books are based on the iconography of madness and its treatments, particularly ‘Los howling’ (the straitjacket), and Urizen ‘in chains of the mind locked up’ (fettered wrists and ankles): *The Book of Urizen*, plates 7 and 22; *SPP*, 218, 232. ‘Blake and Madness: The World Turned Inside Out’, *ELH*, 57 (1990), 585-642.

<sup>7</sup> David Erdman argues for the building of 1815 (now the Imperial War Museum, near Blake’s home of the 1790s in Lambeth), but this requires that Los cross the Thames and

walk ten times the distance otherwise supposed: 'Lambeth and Bethlehem in Blake's *Jerusalem*', *Modern Philology*, 48 (1950-51), 184-92.

<sup>8</sup> Morton D. Paley assembles all the materials relevant to understanding Blake's involvement in 'Cowper as Blake's Spectre', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 (1968), 236-52. There is also an account in Morchard Bishop, *Blake's Hayley*, London, 1951, chapters 17-19.

<sup>9</sup> *The Life and Posthumous Writings of William Cowper*, London, 3 vols., 1803-4, I. 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Blake Records*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> *Blake Records*, 105-6. Blake is also described as resembling 'our beloved bard [Cowper] in the tenderness of his heart and in the perilous powers of an imagination utterly unfit to take due care of himself'. As a whole the letter shows Hayley recognizing what is unusual in Blake's work in positive terms.

<sup>12</sup> 'I have also every wish to befriend him [Blake] from a motive that, I know, our dear angelic Cowper would approve, because this poor man, with an admirable quickness of apprehension and with uncommon powers of mind, has often appeared to me on the verge of insanity.' Letter to Lady Hesketh; *Blake Records*, 164.

<sup>13</sup> But see G. E. Bentley Jr., *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake*, New Haven, CT, 2001, 342 and 368-82.

<sup>14</sup> Anne K. Mellor, 'Physiognomy, Phrenology, and Blake's Visionary Heads', in Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (eds.), *Blake in his Time*, Bloomington, 1978.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the discussion 'Mad or not Mad?' in the most important nineteenth-century biography, Alexander Gilchrist's (London, 1863; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1880).

<sup>16</sup> The most reliable anecdotes are those of Henry Crabb Robinson: *Blake Records*, 535-49. Cf. the discussions of Seymour Kirkup: Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise*, 336-7.

<sup>17</sup> See Susie I. Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change*, Cambridge, 1972; Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart*, Cambridge, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> *Blake Records*, 208.

<sup>19</sup> 'Those who have been told that my works are but an unscientific and irregular eccentricity, a madman's scrawls, I demand of them to do me the justice to examine before they decide' (from the advertisement; E, 527-8). 'This has hitherto been his lot [Blake's] - to get patronage for others and then to be left and neglected, and his work, which gained that patronage, cried down as eccentricity and madness' (*A Descriptive Catalogue*, III; E, 537-8).

<sup>20</sup> *Blake Records*, 215-16. It may be indicative - or at least Blake may have thought it so - that from May to December 1808 *The Examiner* ran a series of seven essays, signed with Robert Hunt's symbol of the pointing hand, arguing 'the folly and danger of Methodism'.

<sup>21</sup> *Blake Records*, 536. Cf. the Gothic novelist and book collector, William Beckford, on 'Mr. Blake, the mad draughtman's poetical compositions', which he compares to those of a thief who steals 'from the walls of Bedlam': *Blake Records*, 430.

<sup>22</sup> Greville MacDonald, M.D., *The Sanity of William Blake*, London, 1908 (an expanded version of a lecture to the Ruskin Union); Joseph H. Wicksteed, 'The So-Called "Madness" of William Blake', *The Quest: A Quarterly Review*, 3 (1911), 81-99.

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Wicksteed wrote in response to G. K. Chesterton's *William Blake* (London, 1910), which contains an extensive discussion of Blake's 'madness'.

<sup>23</sup> For Cunningham see *Blake Records*, 476-507; for Wilkinson, Palmer, and *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* see G. E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Books*, Oxford, 1977, 436, 881, 726; for FitzGerald see G. E. Bentley Jr. (ed.), *William Blake: The Critical Heritage*, London, 1975, 58. Rossetti's selection was published in the series the Aldine Poets; Patmore's essay in his *Principle in Art*. For other cases see Deborah Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet from Gilchrist to Yeats*, New Haven, 1969, 34-44. On the claim Palmer refuted see Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake*, Oxford, 1927, appendix III.